



## 2026 HESI Global Forum

*Reimagining Higher Education for Global Transformation toward a Sustainable Future*

*9 July 2026, 08.00 – 10.00 AM (EDT, virtual)*

The 2026 HESI Global Forum, held as a special event to the 2026 [High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development \(HLPF\)](#), will be convened under the theme **“Reimagining Higher Education for Global Transformation toward a Sustainable Future.”** In line with the 2026 HLPF focus on transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Forum will explore how higher education can serve as a catalyst for global solutions, systemic change and inclusive sustainable development.

Recent UNESCO analysis<sup>1</sup> underscores that higher education is at a turning point, shaped by technological disruption, demographic change, shifting labor market expectations, growing international mobility, financial pressures and persistent inequalities in access, quality, completion and opportunity. These trends reinforce the urgency of reimagining higher education as a driver of sustainable development, social mobility, international cooperation, resilience and inclusive growth.

In a context marked by persistent inequalities, accelerating technological and environmental change, and growing interdependencies, the Forum will examine how higher education institutions can move from commitment to implementation. It will highlight how universities and higher education networks are embedding sustainability across teaching and learning, research and innovation, institutional transformation, student engagement and multi-stakeholder partnerships, while upholding the principles of equity, inclusion and leaving no one behind.

The Forum will also emphasize the role of universities as knowledge producers, conveners and co-creators of knowledge. Higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to generate evidence, support policy and practice, foster critical inquiry, and work with communities, governments, students, Indigenous and local knowledge holders, civil society, business and the United Nations system to advance sustainable development. In this regard, academic freedom and institutional autonomy remain essential foundations for enabling universities to contribute meaningfully to public debate, innovation, evidence-informed policymaking and societal transformation.

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<sup>1</sup> Higher education global trends report: towards inclusive, equitable and quality higher education in an internationally mobile landscape, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000398121>

The Forum will place particular emphasis on higher education’s contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals under in-depth review at the 2026 HLPF: SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation, SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy, SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and SDG 17 on partnerships for the Goals. It will also recognize the enabling role of education for sustainable development, including SDG 4.7, in advancing progress across the 2030 Agenda.

## Preparatory process

The Forum is being prepared through an inclusive and action-oriented process led through the HESI Community of Practice, building on its first meeting held on 14 April 2026, survey responses from HESI partners and members. The first CoP meeting identified key challenges and opportunities across teaching and learning, research and innovation, and partnerships and engagement, including the need for more systemic approaches, stronger links between higher education, policy and practice, greater coherence across existing initiatives, and more action-oriented collaboration.

## Expected outputs and follow-up

The Forum will generate key messages and practical recommendations on how higher education can accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda while also helping to shape forward-looking thinking on sustainable development toward and beyond 2030, with particular attention to SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17, as well as the cross-cutting role of SDG 4.7 on education for sustainable development.

The outcomes of the Forum will inform a forthcoming **HESI Snapshot**, to be launched in fall 2026. The publication will draw on survey responses, HESI Community of Practice discussions, targeted contributions from HESI Action Groups and UN partners, selected higher education initiatives, and Forum deliberations. It will synthesize emerging priorities, showcase practical examples, and identify pathways for strengthening teaching and learning, research and innovation, and partnerships for sustainable development.

The Forum outcomes will also provide a higher education contribution to the [Transforming Education Summit +4: System Transformation and Resilience for SDG 4](#), convened by the United Nations Secretary-General and the Director-General of UNESCO on 10 July 2026. In doing so, they will help bring higher education perspectives into broader discussions on education system transformation and help position HESI to contribute to key 2027 milestones, including the review of SDG 4 at the 2027 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the 2027 SDG Summit.

## Programme

Time	Session
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8:00–8:15	<p><b>Opening session</b></p> <p>The opening will set the context for the Forum as a special event to the 2026 HLPF. It will introduce the Forum theme, highlight the SDGs under review, and situate the discussion within broader global trends affecting higher education, including technological disruption, inequality, financial pressures, mobility, AI, and the need for more inclusive, equitable and resilient higher education systems.</p>
8:15–8:45	<p><b>Session 1: Transforming higher education institutions and learning for sustainable futures</b></p> <p>This segment will explore how higher education institutions can move from sustainability commitments to operational transformation while ensuring that equity, inclusion and leaving no one behind remain central. It will examine how sustainability can be embedded across governance, teaching and learning, curriculum design, student engagement, campus operations, institutional culture, leadership, quality assurance and accountability. The segment will also focus on the competencies learners need for sustainable futures, including green skills, systems thinking, ethical reasoning, digital and AI literacy, and the capacity to act in partnership with communities and institutions.</p>
8:45–9:15	<p><b>Session 2: Universities as knowledge producers and co-creators: connecting research, policy and practice</b></p> <p>This segment will focus on the role of universities as producers, stewards and co-creators of knowledge for sustainable development. It will explore how higher education research, innovation and expertise can more effectively inform policy, support implementation, reach communities and contribute to public understanding. The segment will also highlight the importance of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and critical inquiry as essential conditions for universities to generate evidence, challenge assumptions and contribute meaningfully to public debate and policy processes. At the same time, it will emphasize that knowledge for sustainable development is not produced by universities alone, but through collaboration with students, communities, Indigenous and local knowledge holders, governments, civil society, business, publishers and the UN system.</p>
9:15–9:45	<p><b>Session 3: Partnerships that deliver for SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17</b></p> <p>This segment will showcase practical partnership models through which higher education institutions contribute to the SDGs under review at HLPF 2026. It will highlight how universities and higher education networks work with communities, local authorities, governments, businesses, civil society, students, publishers, Indigenous and local knowledge holders, and UN entities to move from knowledge and intention to implementation and impact.</p>
9:45–10:00	<p><b>Closing session: Higher education toward and beyond 2030</b></p> <p>The closing segment will synthesize main messages and connect them to the future role of higher education toward and beyond 2030.</p>